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MARVEL PREVIEW
№ 10 $1
MARVEL PREVIEW PRESENTS
THOR
THE MIGHTY
ALL NEW!
"BLOOD QUEST!"
THE POWER AND THE MAJESTY OF THE GREATEST WARRIOR OF ALL!

STAN LEE presents

Vol.1/No.10
Winter 1977

# THOR

## THE MIGHTY

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Design
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Art Consultant
JIM NOVAK
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DAVIDA LICHTER DALE
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KEN BARR
Cover
JIM STARLIN
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# PREVIEW REVIEW

**A mixed bag. That's really the final summation of your many comments on our *Legion of Monsters* issue. But that's hardly a bleak assessment. Many of you did enjoy the chance to get reacquainted with the members of our horror "family" and each story garnered its fair share of rave notices. But the most positive aspect of things was the obviously renewed and heightened interest in an all-new horror title which MARVEL PREVIEW #8 seemed to precipitate. Even those of you who didn't like the issue pleaded for the return of the horror format at some future date. What can we say? If sales are good and the right people are available—who knows. Meantime, let's not extrapolate too much on the future, when we've got such choice items dealing with the recent past to tantalize us. Take it away time travelers . . .**

Dear Monster Legionnaires,

MARVEL PREVIEW number eight presenting the LEGION OF MONSTERS was superb! If this is what the late MONSTERS UNLEASHED would have developed into, then I doubly lament its passing. Without a doubt LEGION OF MONSTERS #1 and PREVIEW #8 were the best monster magazines Marvel has done, exceeding even the quality of the classic ZOMBIE series.

Aside from the previously mentioned MONSTERS UNLEASHED and TALES OF THE ZOMBIE I was never overly thrilled with the first batch of Marvel black-and-whites. I wish that the second set had lasted at least that long and I still wait for the day that THE LEGION OF MONSTERS, STARLORD, THOR THE MIGHTY, SHERLOCK HOLMES, MARVEL SUPER-ACTION, and UNKNOWN WORLDS OF SCIENCE FICTION become regular visitors to my newsstand. Thus do I cast my vote.

It seems to me that the black-and-white field is one that is ripe for conquest; however to establish a successful foothold you must break in with a series of mind-boggling blockbusters. The original group of black-and-whites just didn't have it and the second was callously murdered before given a chance. I await THE RAMPAGING HULK with nervous anticipation. I can't imagine what Doug Moench has cooked up for ol' greenskin. (Looks like he'll be back to Stan Lee's original greyskin in this mag, right?)

So. Thus endeth the letter; not with a bang, but with a suggestion or two: for future issues I suggest the INVADERS, the X-MEN by Mike Ploog, and how about finishing up that DRACULA adaption, huh? Adios.

Yours Truly,

Rick Hutchins
24 Bayley Terrace
S. Weymouth, Mass. 02190

**Nothing would give us more pleasure Rick, than to be able to finish that much heralded, though uncompleted DRACULA masterpiece by Roy Thomas and Dick Giordano. Sorrowfully, we simply haven't got a place to put it at the present moment, of which we're sure you're painfully aware. But you can bet your pearly white fangs that if we ever do revive a horror anthology title, *that* little item is definitely going to be on the "must consider" list.**

**We really can't say anything about the possible appearance of the Invaders in black-and-white, but by now you've undoubtedly feasted your awestruck little eyeballs on the *original* X-Men, as they appeared in the second blockbusting issue of everybody's favorite RAMPAGING HULK black-and-white. That issue was a pure labor of love by Doug Moench and Walt Simonson and we think it showed.**

**Speaking of labors of love, one of your days of waiting is over, Rick. After the pandemonious reception MARVEL PREVIEW #4, received, it's our considerable pleasure to announce that next issue (right here in these pages) heralds the return of none other than—STARLORD! Chris Claremont, John Byrne, and Terry Austin have absolutely knocked themselves silly to insure that this will be a cosmic epic well worth the wait. We don't want to get too carried away here, people, but you definitely have a treat in store for yourselves next time. Miss it not!**

Dear Archie and John,

Year's end draws near. It is a time of re-evaluation, a new sense of direction is felt. I know that in a few months I will be "out" of high school, and a few months later I will be at college. I know that I will be faced with budgets and money will be tight, and I know that for the first time in twelve years I will be realistic and end part of my comic collecting. I think I am writing this letter of suggestions out of selfishness, because I am going to want a lot for the money I will pay for the comics I will retain regularly.

I think the real future in comic books lies in the black and white market. The black and whites share much in common with Mike Friedrich's "ground level" comic, STAR REACH, in that they can appeal to a more mature audience and can give the writers and artists a free rein to explore imaginative ideas in a more "adult" and "artistic" manner. The color comics have way too many limitations—in subject matter and in space (only 17 pages per story now!). This is why I am dismayed at the ever-shrinking black and white market—Warren is back to three titles, Skywald and Charlton have folded, and you are cutting back as well.

Since you are cutting back, I know you are trying to make the most of what you have. The discontinuations in recent months were attempts to pave the way for new ideas—it is too bad that really great ideas have to fade away just for this reason. I, for one, would much rather drop some of the color titles in favor of new black & whites—three SPIDERMAN titles and all those reprints are purely ridiculous.

If I were in charge of the black and white line, what would I do? Well, first off, I would forbid any monthly magazines. We get enough of CONAN and KUNG FU, and we had too much APES after one issue! A monthly run of five books would allow ten MARVEL black and whites to flourish! Half of your mags failed because you provided too much competition yourself!

My proposal then, would have ten MARVEL black and whites, with alternating publication so five would be out per month. What would the ten magazines be? (I thought you'd never ask!)

1) The high quality material in the SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN would be missed too much if it were gone. CONAN is a character made for the B&W market—savage, gutsy, great! Retaining the SSOC is a must.

2) THE DEADLY HANDS OF KUNG FU, too, has been outstanding in quality. I understand this mag is to end soon. This is really too bad, because it is one of my favorites. THE SONS OF THE TIGER is unique because here is a series that totally belongs to the B&W line-up.

3) The idea behind MARVEL PREVIEW is interesting, and this mag would be kept to present new ideas and concepts.

4) Because of my over abiding love for the Man of Bronze, he, too, would be kept in his own mag. Doug has written some great scripts, and the art has been consistently fantastic (with the exceptions of the covers). I would give the strip a rest from DeZuinga, and give the likes of Mayerick and Kane a shot at it.

5) UNKNOWN WORLDS OF SCIENCE FICTION would be reinstated if I ran the show. There would be a few minor changes—1) Text pieces would be added and 2) Mantlo's THE SWORD AND THE STAR would revolve with McGregor's and Russell's WAR OF THE WORLDS on a regular basis, but not necessarily always be featured on the cover.

6) I've seen many comic book adaptations of the master detective, but only MARVEL'S SHERLOCK HOLMES captured the true feeling of Doyle's stories.

7) I am still excited about that one-shot MARVEL SUPER ACTION, and still so intrigued by the series in that mag that it would be a must for this mag to continue. THE PUNISHER and DOMINIC FORTUNE are too interesting of characters to remain in limbo.

8) MARVEL's unique treatment of the horror comics remains vividly in my mind. I would continue in either the tradition set by MASTERS OF TERROR or the MARVEL PREVIEW# SATANA issue, or a combination of both.

9) I've heard that TARZAN will soon be out, MARVEL style. I'm excited, I'd publish it sight unseen.

10) As you can see, I've been impressed with most of your work—of the ten magazines I'd publish, most are ideas you've already tried out. This last one is a bit unique, though. Remember when THE HULK and the SUB-MARINER and CAP & IRON MAN shared the same mags? The B&W magazine would be ideal to revitalize this type of comic! John Warner's BLOODSTONE could take up half the book, and maybe someone like TIGRA or SON OF SATAN or WARLOCK or DEATHLOK could fill the other void.

As you can see, I'd drop the HULK and CRAZY from the line-up. CRAZY was great, back when Wolfman and Gerber were in control, but this Laikin guy (whoever he is) sure screwed it up—it's like the mag is done by an entirely different company! And the HULK is in enough color comics—we don't need to see any more of him.

I'm just about ready to shut up, but first there are a few things I'd like to say:

—Can't you just imagine a SON OF SATAN—GABRIEL team-up?

—Give SGT FURY & HIS HOWLING COMMANDOS a shot in MARVEL PREVIEW!

—The absence of Don McGregor from the pages of MARVEL worries me—get that cat back and get him writing some more classics!

Thank you for listening to my ideas, keep the peace, and MAKE MINE MARVEL!

Terry R. Coyle
515 N. Sycamore St.
Monticello, Iowa 52310

**You've said more than a mouthful there, Terry, for you've really put your finger on the hopes and aspirations of so many of us working in this medium. We believe the future of comic books lay in a number of varying formats, of which the black-and-white area holds a prominent position for just some of the reasons you've mentioned. We're constantly searching for alternatives and it's gratifying to know your concern for our line of magazines runs as deeply as ours.**

**Although your artistic sensitivities may grate at the notion of three SPIDER-MAN books, apparently they are selling well enough to continue. There is a demand for more of Spider-Man and that's justification of a sort. The reprint titles we have offer a new Marvelite an excellent chance to become acquainted with the early classics of the Marvel Age without having to pay the large sums for back issues many collectors ask.**

**Keep with us, Terry. Even now we're planning to unleash a plethora of special projects which will surely enlarge the horizons of the graphic story art. And we want your comments on each and every one.**

Dear John, et. al.,

MARVEL PREVIEW # 8 was the absolute worst issue so far.

The only thing which wasn't obvious about the plot of the Morbius story was the exact cause of Slade's condition, which didn't really matter. However, the characteristics of Morbius was excellent. On that, kudos to Doug and Sonny, who depicted the cursed doctor's anguish beautifully.

I wanted Blade back, but not this way. The tale was not even worth the paper it was printed on. No plot worth mentioning, no characterization, just an uninteresting incident. The Vampire Slayer deserves better.

"The Reality Manipulators" was a sloppy presentation of an excellent premise. It was full of bad bits.

On "Curse of Anubis," explain the credits "Plot: Russ Jones, Story: John Warner." In my book, plot and story are the same thing. Should one of those have been "Script" or "Dialogue"? About the story itself, it was very bad. The Anubis creature was so obviously Thompson. However, I couldn't follow the last panel. Please explain it.

Ralph Macchio's article was the best thing in the whole magazine, though he dealt with the horror magazines more than the monsters themselves.

Speaking of your editorial, it never explained where these stories came from. They seem to have been hastily thrown together. So hastily that Morbius' logo (if that's what the bat-shaped thing in his title panel was) was unlettered.

About next ish, John, I'm holding you to your word. See you then!

Ted Watson
1807 Valley Forge Ave.
Ft. Collins, Colo. 80521

**Well, by now you know that Joyful John Warner wasn't talking through his hat when he promised the appearance of Man-God.**

**If you do really want to know where the various stories came from which appeared in PREVIEW # 8, we do have an answer. When it became obvious that for numerous reasons Man-God would not appear as planned, we immediately reached into our large inventory of unused horror stories and selected a representative sample for publication. The stories you saw in that issue had originally been intended for any one of our previously cancelled black-and-white horror mags and we had them on hand waiting to be used.**

**Also, the seeming lack of a recognizable Morbius logo was not an error of haste or sloppiness. Actually the logo is lettered and if you'll look closely at it, you'll be able to make out the name. However, when we saw the bat-like lettering we felt it would appear more impressive if the individual letters were toned (the process wherein various shades of blacks and grays are added to captions and the like for contrast effect). Unfortunately, when the logo was reduced in size during the reproduction process, the tone ran together and you saw the result. It's regrettable and we're sorry. Friends again, Ted?**

Dear John and Ralph,

MARVEL PREVIEW # 8 brought back fond memories of days gone past when Marvel's considerable line-up of horror titles was just beginning to reach their zenith before being cut down. The reasons for the strange comings and goings of monster magazines at Marvel is quite a mystery to me. Consider that MAN-THING was nominated time and again for the coveted Shazam award, yet was cancelled. Also, another of Steve Gerber's fine attempts which seemingly failed was TALES OF THE ZOMBIE. I just don't understand. Still, it's interesting how personally I've reacted to such characters as the Zombie and Man-Thing. I really feel I can better relate to the hell and torment of someone who is suffering such grotesque deformity, or is possessed by demons, etc., than I can relate to a lighthearted superhero outing like NOVA.

Anyway, let me give you my own format for a potential new horror/fantasy magazine. First there should be several alternating series such as *Man-Thing, Satana, Son of Satan,* or the *Sword in the Star*. The book could be a monthly, with two, 30 page features from the above list. I think if a new title were to work with this format, it would be a success. And I

Well, I hope I've given you something to think about at least. So till next ish . . .

Mark Ryan
10236 Monark Dr.
St. Louis MO. 63136

*Well-known West Coast disc jockey, Gabriel Windom, appeared as our own Thunder God, The Mighty Thor at a past San Diego Comics Con. We thought you'd get a kick out of seeing it.*

**Many readers have written to us expressing their feelings of close kinship with many of the shambling monstrosities who've sloshed their way through our horror titles. Perhaps in their unrelieved torment and anguish, they idealize an image even more enduring in the human psyche than the heroic image.**

Dear John, Ralph and Archie (and Bullpen),

At this late point in time, I don't really care if we ever get around to seeing MAN-GOD or TITAN or whatever you've decided to call him.

I wasn't the least bit upset to see that this issue was given over to the LEGION OF MONSTERS. Like you, I strongly feel that Marvel should resurrect at least one of its old monster magazines to provide a home for the many monsters currently floating around loose.

Doug and Sonny did an excellent job in adding to the Morbius tales with their story. Perhaps some might accuse it of a lack of substance since no further milestones were put down in his life, however I am afraid that we shall have to wait until he gets a regular home before such things occur. My one complaint could be the practical predictability of the story's ending. Supposedly, we are to be surprised that Ronson Slade is the madman when Jeremiah Slade is the obvious suspect. However the many not-so-subtle clues dropped about page 18 sort of pointed the answer, and the tale's ending, right out.

Ralph did an excellent job with his text feature spotlighting upon your run of monster magazines, which made me all the more nostalgic and in the mood for a new one.

The Blade story was supposedly set up upon the basis of Blade's susceptibility to compassion, however the shortness of the story marred its effect markedly. One second he couldn't bring himself to kill the "children" and then almost in the next breath he was sinking his blades into them. Still, the emotions were effectively running high by the end of the story, and it was a pleasure.to see Gene doing his own washes.

Although one might question whether or not the "Reality Manipulators" belonged in a book which was devoted to series-type 'monster stories with one continual hero, the tale was quite enjoyable. And I hope that if a monster magazine is to be spawned, the format will be flexible enough to include a tale such as this upon occasion.

As for Anubis: why did you do it? I find very little to distinguish Anubis from the many other creatures floating around the Marvel universe without a home, and the initial story lacked the punch that could've saved it. Please don't flog a dead format to death, but don't leave Anubis floating around loose either. Let's see him one more time, and in that appearance let's see the conclusion of his little saga.

There is definitely a place for another monster black-and-white. It's my belief that one which features strong, exciting, central figures in continuing stories would do better than a mag devoted to anthology short stories. I hope you'll consider it.

Larry Twiss
227 Fox Run
King of Prussia, PA. 19406

**This issue, through the magic of Asgardian wizardry, you were able to dispel the cares of the workaday world and partake of an odyssey of the gods. Why not return the favor and dispel some of our cares by telling us (in pseudo-Shakespearean if you must) what you thought of our first black-and-white Thor adventure. We'll be waiting as the wine flows freely and the bills mount up. Send all missives and mjolnirs to:**

**PREVIEW REVIEW**
**MARVEL COMICS GROUP**
**575 MADISON AVENUE**
**NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10022**

VIR
REDONDO-75

In the beginning, there was only BURI, he who was called the first of the GODS.
Then Buri begat BOR, and Bor begat the AESIR, whose given names were VE... VILI... and ODIN!
And Odin had him TWO sons; one of these was THOR, the God of Thunder, sprung from his father's loins--while the other he was LOKI, orphan of the Storm Giants, ADOPTED son of ODIN, Thor's HALF-BROTHER.
And days there were when Gods walked the earth with IMPUNITY, when the boundaries between GOOD and EVIL had yet to be clearly DEFINED.
This is a TALE of those long-gone times.

And it came to pass that a period of great PEACE fell upon the eternal realm called ASGARD, that golden land beyond the rainbow bridge. The war with the OLYMPIANS was long since OVER now, no NEW specter of COMBAT had yet raised its hoary head...
...And thus, at last, in a great MEADHALL, the fabled IMMORTALS of Asgard, all WARRIORS BORN and having no new FOE to battle, did battle amongst THEMSELVES!
And, verily, the GREATEST of these noble warriors was...
THOR
THE MIGHTY!
In truth, it had been he and his comrades who had INSTIGATED the conflict in the first place!



Story: LEN WEIN
Art: JIM STARLIN & TONY DEZUNIGA

WHEN NEXT THOU DOST OPEN THY BRAGGART'S MOUTH, CROMDAR, 'TWILL BE SOLELY TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE SON OF ODIN THY BETTER!
BROK!
AYE, AND MY GOOD COMRADES AS WELL!

I APPRECIATE THINE EFFORTS ON MY BEHALF, THUNDER GOD--
--BUT FANDRAL THE DASHING DOTH NEED NO OTHER MAN OR GOD TO DEFEND HIS NOBLE NAME FOR HIM!
CHUD!

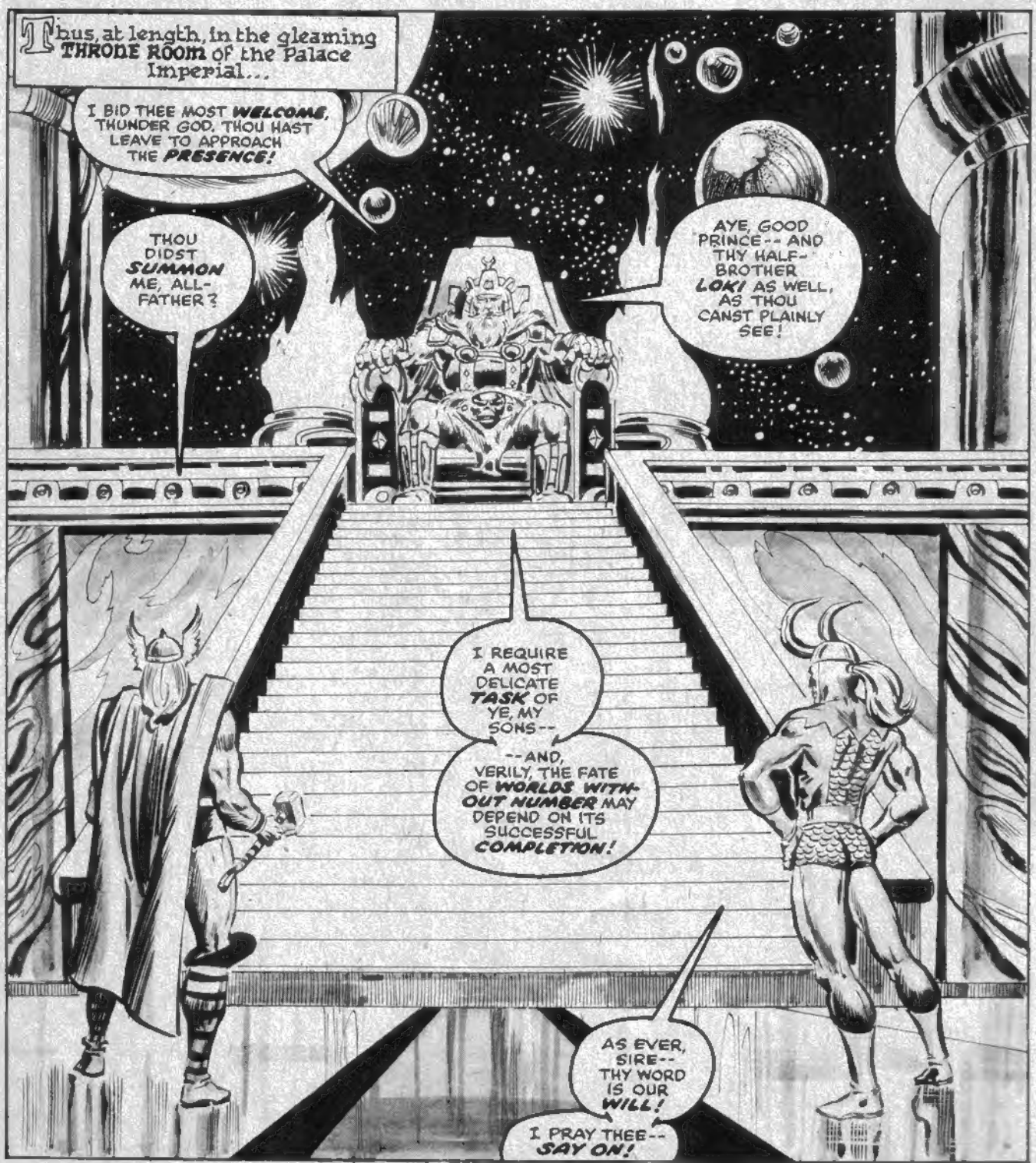
NOR DOTH HOGUN THE GRIM, FRIEND THOR!
TROK!
ON MY POOREST DAY, I CAN VANQUISH FOES THRICE AS WORTHY AS THESE KNAVES!

BAH! 'TIS BENEATH THE FABLED DIGNITY OF VALOROUS VOLSTAGG TO BRAWL LIKE SOME COMMON GUTTER SNIPE!
I TURN MY BACK ON SUCH UNSEEMLY CHILDISHNESS!
UUNFF!!
WOULDST THOU MIGHT TURN THINE AWESOME STOMACH AS EASILY, VAST ONE!

Then, from the meadhall's ENTRANCEWAY, a solemn VOICE spake thusly...
CEASE, I SAY THEE!
LET THERE BE AN END TO THIS UNWORTHY FOOLISHNESS!

NOBLE THOR, THY GLORIOUS FATHER HATH SENT ME TO FETCH THEE TO HIM!
IN A MOMENT, MESSENGER! SEVERAL OF MY FOES STILL STAND!
ODIN DESIRES THY PRESENCE IMMEDIATELY, MILORD.
OH... VERY WELL THEN.

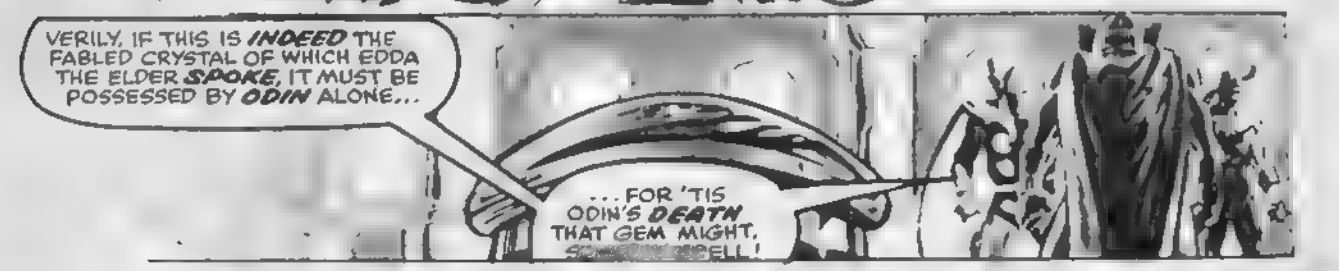
Verily, the God of Thunder was much YOUNGER in those bygone days, his temper more QUICK, his heart less UNDERSTANDING.
But still was his noble father MONARCH of the Realm Eternal, LORD over all who lived, be they MEN... or GODS.
Odin's slightest wish was a COMMAND that dare not be DISOBEYED, not even by his own beloved son and heir.


Thus, at length, in the gleaming THRONE ROOM of the Palace Imperial...
I BID THEE MOST WELCOME, THUNDER GOD. THOU HAST LEAVE TO APPROACH THE PRESENCE!
THOU DIDST SUMMON ME, ALL-FATHER?
AYE, GOOD PRINCE-- AND THY HALF-BROTHER LOKI AS WELL, AS THOU CANST PLAINLY SEE!
I REQUIRE A MOST DELICATE TASK OF YE, MY SONS--
--AND, VERILY, THE FATE OF WORLDS WITHOUT NUMBER MAY DEPEND ON ITS SUCCESSFUL COMPLETION!
AS EVER, SIRE-- THY WORD IS OUR WILL!
I PRAY THEE-- SAY ON!

THINE ENTHUSIASM PLEASES ME GREATLY, LOKI--
--FOR THERE BE THOSE WITHIN THE REALM WHO SPEAK ILL OF THEE, WHO SAY THOU ART NOT TO BE TRUSTED...
...YET, VERILY, OF ALL THE GODS OF ASGARD, ONLY YE TWO WOULD I TRUST WITH THIS MISSION MOST SACRED!
BUT STILL THE OBJECT OF THIS MISSION REMAINS A MYSTERY FATHER!
THY FAITH IN THIS MOST HUMBLE SERVANT DOES ME GREAT HONOR, SIRE.
THOU WOULDST DO WELL TO SHARE THY BROTHER'S PATIENCE THUNDER GOD ODIN'S WAY IS HIS ALONE!
MY SONS HAST THOU EER HEARD OF... THE "ONE"?
AYE MILORD THE DARK SEER CALLED EDDA THE ELDER HATH SAID THAT HE WOULD APPEAR SOMEDAY TO OVERTHROW THEE!
AYE FLESH OF MY FLESH ALL THAT WAS SAID--AND MORE!
FOR, 'TWAS SAID AS WELL THIS UNKNOWN FOE WOULD COME FROM THE EAST--!
AND THAT HE WOULD HOLD A CRYSTAL POSSESSED OF SUCH POWER AS TO HUMBLE EVEN THEE!
I RECALL THE LEGEND MOST CLEARLY NOW, OMNIPOTENT ONE!
BUT SURELY THE TALE IS LITTLE MORE THAN SO MUCH SUPERSTITIOUS NONSENSE, ALL-FATHER
I PRAY THEE RECALL, MY BROTHER--THAT TO SOME, WE ARE MERELY LEGENDS!

IN TRUTH, FOR A TIME EVEN I BELIEVED EDDA THE ELDER'S WORDS NAUGHT BUT I FEAR, NOBLE THOR...
BUT NOW MILORD...?
NOW THUNDER GOD I FEAR I HAVE MY DOUBTS.
SINCE THE BEGINNING OF OUR INFORMATION EXCHANGE WITH THE OLYMPIANS, WORDS HATH REACHED MINE EARS THAT DISTURB ME GREATLY!
THERE IS NAUGHT THAT ESCAPES ODIN'S NOTICE AND THUS I HAVE HEARD DARK WHISPERS ON THE MIDNIGHT WIND...
WHISPERS WHICH TELL OF A MOST FORMIDABLE CRYSTAL...
. MAYHAP A CRYSTAL WHICH COULD HUMBLE EVEN THE MONARCH OF THE REALM ETERNAL!!
LEARNED HATH IT THAT THIS CRYSTAL WAS CREATED BY AN ENCHANTER WHOSE NAME HATH BEEN LONG SINCE LOST TO TIME!
"IN THE BLOOD OF THREE SCORE MEN WAS THIS CURSED CRYSTAL BAPTIZED THREE MONTHS OVER IN THE FULL OF THE MOON...
...WHILE CERTAIN PHRASES WERE BESPOKEN O'ER IT THAT I DARE NOT REPEAT EVEN TO THEE!
"NOW 'TIS SAID THIS CRYSTAL WAS UNIQUE 'MONGST ALL THE CRYSTALS OF FAIR ASGARD AND MIDGARD BOTH...
"...FOR THIS ENCHANTED GEMSTONE DID POSSESS THE MOST POTENT POWER OF ALL...
"...THE POWER TO GENERATE TOTAL NON-EXISTENCE!

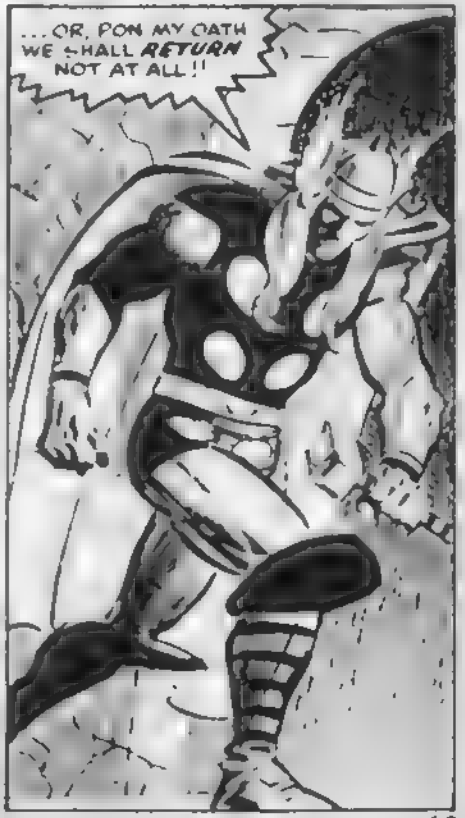
YET, DESPITE THIS AWESOME POWER, THAT NAMELESS MAGE AT LAST MET DEATH--AT THE HAND OF A HIRED ASSASSIN!
THEN, FOR YEARS BEYOND NUMBERING, THE BLOOD CRYSTAL PASSED FROM HAND TO HAND...
..UNTIL AT LAST, A BEING OF GREAT GOOD WILL AND MUCH WISDOM SECURED THE MYSTIC GEMSTONE..
...AND THEN DID BURY IT DEEP WITHIN A CAVERN GUARDED BY CREATURES FAR BEYOND MORTAL KEN!


VERILY, IF THIS IS INDEED THE FABLED CRYSTAL OF WHICH EDDA THE ELDER SPOKE, IT MUST BE POSSESSED BY ODIN ALONE...
...FOR 'TIS ODIN'S DEATH THAT GEM MIGHT,

THE OLYMPIANS, IT SEEMS HAVE NO USE FOR THE CRYSTAL.
...OR ELSE THEY KNOW NOT ITS TRUE VALUE!
THUS, THOUGH IT MAY VIOLATE OUR TRUCE WITH THE OLYMPIANS THERE IS BUT ONE THING WE CAN DO!

AT MY COMMAND THOU SHALT GET THEE HENCE TO THE LAND OF SHADOW--
--AND BRING ME BACK THE CURSED CRYSTAL OF BLOOD!!

AYE ALL-FATHER--WE SHALL RETURN WITH THE MYSTIC GEMSTONE THOU SEEKEST...


...OR, PON MY OATH WE SHALL RETURN NOT AT ALL!!

Thus, soon...
WHITHER DO WE TRAVEL, THUNDER GOD?
TO THE DARKLING CASTLE WHERE DWELLS A SORCERESS OF WHOM I'VE HEARD, LOKI--
--IN HOPES THAT SHE MIGHT AID OUR NOBLE

WITH THE CRYSTAL OF BLOOD IN HIS POSSESSION, THERE WILL BE NO ENEMY OF THE REALM WHO LIVES THAT MAY STAND AGAINST THE POWER OF ODIN!

RATHER AGAINST THE POWER OF LOKI, THOU DOST MEAN, DEAR BROTHER--
--FOR IN THE END 'TIS THE GOD OF MISCHIEF WHO SHALL POSSESS THE ENCHANTED BLOOD CRYSTAL!

FOR FAR TOO LONG HATH LOKI BEEN FORCED TO SCHEME HIS SCHEMES IN SECRET, FEARFUL OF ODIN'S VENGEANCE..
..BUT ONCE THAT MIRACULOUS GEMSTONE IS MINE TO WIELD, I WILL NEED FEAR NOTHING!
FOR LOKI HIMSELF SHALL BE FEAR INCARNATE!

And at length...
THERE IT DOTH BE, MY BROTHER! NOW PRAY THAT THE SORCERESS BE HOME!

HAIL, THE CASTLE!!
THE MIGHTY THOR, GOD OF THUNDER SON OF ODIN, PRINCE OF THE REALM ETERNAL-- AND LOKI GOD OF MISCHIEF-- DOTH SEEK ENTRANCE!
TURN US AWAY AT THY PERIL!!

THERE DOTH BE NO NEED TO SHOUT SO THUNDER GOD! THOU SHALT FIND THE CASTLE BATTLEMENTS OPEN AND WAITING!
THE DARK SORCERESS SHAMALLA BIDS THEE WELCOME TO HER HOME!

Thus did it come to pass that the sons of Odin SUPPED at the witch-woman's table--
--and though the repast was both succulent and SWEET, the taste left in their mouths was most BITTER!
THOU DOST SEEM SOMEHOW DISTRACTED, GOOD GENTLEMEN. DIDST THOU FIND THY MEAL SOMEHOW LACKING?

NAY MOST FAIR ONE 'T IS JUST THAT OUR THOUGHTS MUST E'ER BE CONCERNED WITH OUR GLORIOUS QUEST!

AH-- THEN THOU DOST COME SEEKING THE CRYSTAL OF BLOOD!
KNOW YE THOU ART NOT THE FIRST!

MANY A BRAVE WARRIOR HATH PASSED THE CASTLE OF SHAMBALLA ON HIS WAY TO FIND THAT GEMSTONE!
NONE HAVE E'ER RETURNED.

PERHAPS SO SORCERESS BUT NONE HAVE E'ER BEEN THOR!

AYE THUNDER GOD METHINKS THOU MAYEST WELL BE RIGHT.

WILT THOU GIVE US DIRECTIONS TO THE BLOOD CRYSTAL THEN, SHAMBALLA-- AND POINT US ON OUR WAY?

I SHALL GIVE THEE WHATEVER THOU DESIREST GOLDEN-HAIR.

AYE... WHATEVER THOU DESIREST.

Sleep did not come EASILY to the Thunder God that eve...
Like unto a great caged BEAST did he pace about his bed-chamber, his mind awhirl with THOUGHTS that only a GOD could truly Know.
Alas, did he not HEAR the oaken DOOR slip open behind him...
DO I DISTURB THEE, MILORD?
METHINKS 'TIS DOUBTFUL THOU COULDST, SORCERESS.
HOW MAY I HELP THEE?
THE QUESTION, GOLDEN-HAIR, IS HOW MIGHT I HELP THEE?
I THOUGHT MAYHAP THOU WERT... LONELY.
AYE, THAT I WAS, FAIR ONE. BUT NO LONGER.
NO LONGER.
SOOTH, BUT THY SKIN IS FAR SOFTER THAN AN ANGELS BREATH.
AND THE SCENT OF THEE FAR SWEETER THAN THE FIRST ROSE OF SPRING.
THOU ART A VISION, WOMAN--A DREAM GIVEN SPIRIT AND SUBSTANCE.
AND I AM THING. THUNDER GOD. THING.
THEN COME MY SULTRY SEDUCTRESS, LET US NOT TARRY ANY...
THORRRRR
HEIMDALL'S EYES! THAT BE LOKI'S VOICE--!!
NAY, GOLDEN-HAIR-- 'TIS BUT THE MIDNIGHT WIND WHISTLING THROUGH THE RAMPARTS!
I PRAY THEE-- PAY IT NO NEED!

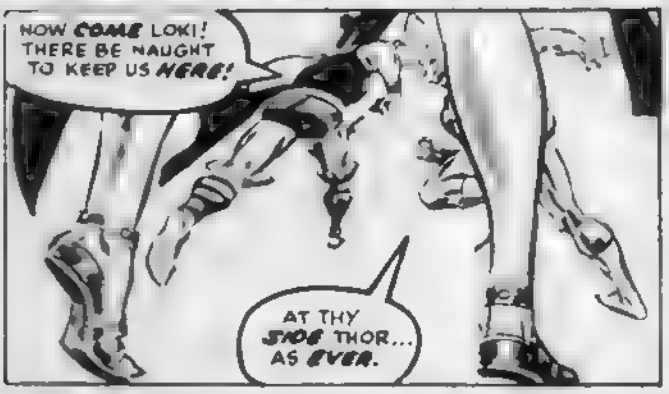
WOMAN, I KNOW MY BROTHER'S VOICE!
I BEG THEE, HANDSOME ONE-- DO NOT ANSWER HIS CALL!
'TWOULD MEAN THY DEATH!
BETTER DEATH THAN DISHONOR, SORCERESS!
IF MY BROTHER DOTH REQUIRE MINE AID 'TIS THOR'S DUTY TO HIE ME TO HIS SYDE!
VERILY, HE WOULD DO THE SAME FOR ME!
SKRAKT!
HAVE FAITH, LOKI-- THY BROTHER IS COME TO DEFEND THEE!
THEN PRAY THEE, BE QUICK ABOUT IT, THUNDER GOD!
A MOMENT LONGER-- AND I SHALL BE LOST TO THESE MONSTERS MOST FOUL!
BUT SO LONG AS THOR DOTH WIELD THE MYSTIC MALLET MJOLNIR--
--THAT MOMENT SHALL NEVER COME TO PASS!!

And, like wheat before the scythe the nameless GNOMES fell back before the savage might of the mallet called MJOLNIR THE DESTROYER...
...returning, at last, to the darkling DEPTHS in which they did dwell.
THOU ART SAFE NOW, LOKI.
AYE BROTHER MINE.

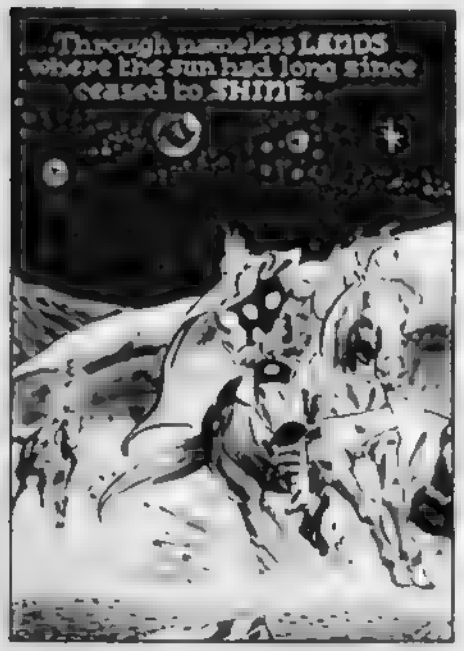
AND WE KNOW NOW WHY THOSE WHO HATH STAYED AT THIS CASTLE NE'ER RETURNED FROM THEIR QUEST TO FIND THE BLOOD CRYSTAL--

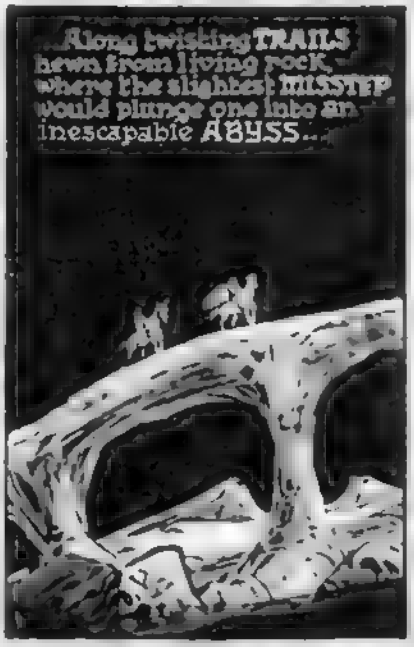
--THE SORCERESS SHAMBALLA DID SELL THEM TO THOSE WHO DWELL BELOW, THAT THEY MIGHT LABOR IN THE SERVICE OF THE GNOMES FOREVER!
AYE, GOLDEN-HAIR-- ALL THAT AND MORE IS TRUE!
BUT I SWEAR I WOULD NE'ER HAVE OFFERED THEM THEE!

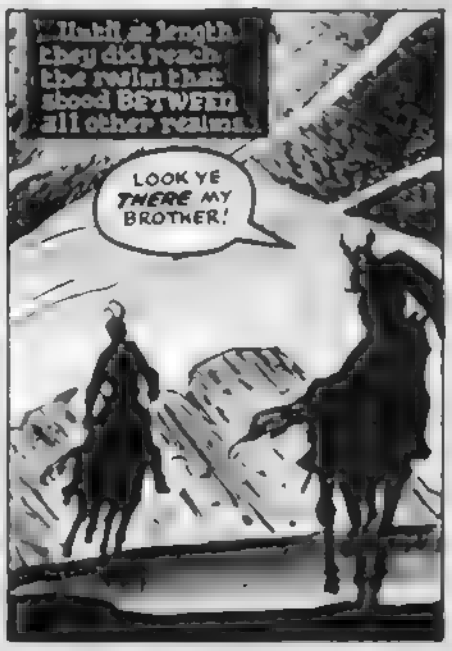
THOU DIDST TOUCH SOMETHING WITHIN ME THAT HATH NE'ER BEEN TOUCHED BEFORE.
ALL I CAN OFFER THEE NOW IS THE INFORMATION THOU DOST SEEK... AND THE HOPE THOU SHALT SOMEDAY FORGIVE ME.
THE FIRST I ACCEPT GLADLY, SORCERESS.
THE SECOND... ONLY TIME WILL TELL.


NOW COME LOKI! THERE BE NAUGHT TO KEEP US HERE!
AT THY SIDE THOR... AS EVER.

And thus it was that the sons of Odin rode out from the witch-woman's CASTLE...


...Through nameless LANDS where the sun had long since ceased to SHINE...


...Along twisting TRAILS hewn from living rock, where the slightest MISSTEP would plunge one into an inescapable ABYSS...


...Until at length they did reach the realm that stood BETWEEN all other realms...
LOOK YE THERE MY BROTHER!

...And knew they at last that their GOAL now stood before them!
'TIS JUST AS THE SORCERESS DESCRIBED IT, LOKI!
A GREAT GRANITE FACE CARVED INTO THE SIDE OF THE MOUNTAIN BY AN UNKNOWN RACE THAT HAS LONG SINCE CEASED TO BE...
WHERE WINDS HOWL WILDLY THROUGH TIME-WORN OPENINGS, LIKE THE WAIL OF UNTOLD SOULS SHRIEKING IN TORMENT!
VERILY LOKI-- WE STAND NOW BEFORE THE CAVERN OF THE SCREAMING SKULL!
AND YON CAVERN ITSELF DOTH STAND AS SOME GREAT MONUMENT TO MADNESS!!

METHINKS WE WOULD BE WISE TO LEAVE OUR MOUNTS OUTSIDE THE CAVERN'S MOUTH, BROTHER
AYE, THEY GROW MORE SKITTISH AND FRIGHTENED THE NEARER WE DRAW TO OUR GOAL!

IN TRUTH, I CANNOT BLAME THEM, LOKI. THERE IS AN AIR ABOUT THIS PLACE...
...A SENSE OF SOMETHING WAITING IN THE DARKNESS...
AYE, THUNDER GOD-- I SENSE IT TOO!

VERILY 'TIS A SENSE OF IMPENDING DOOM!!
And deeper into the smothering DARKNESS did they strid...

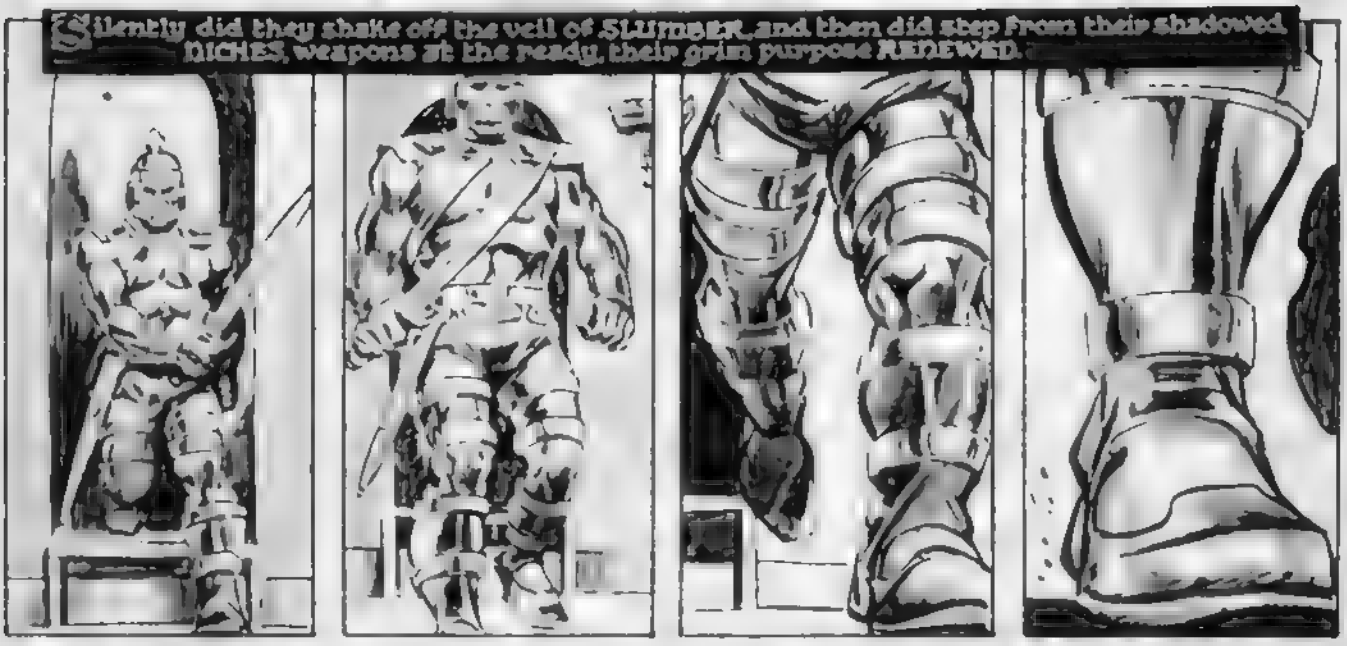
...Until a LIGHT glowing dimly in the distance drew them to a torch-lit CHAMBER...
And they stepped solemnly into the heart of a NIGHTMARE!
AT LAST WE KNOW WHAT BEFELL THOSE WHO DID FIND THE CURSED BLOOD CRYSTAL!
BY NELA! THOSE PAINTED STATUES THAT LINE THE WALLS--THEY SEEM ALMOST ALIVE!

INDEED, LOKI--BUT WE SEEK NOT STATUES HERE!
THAT DOOR AT THE CHAMBER'S FAR END--MAYHAP THE BLOOD CRYSTAL AWAITS BEYOND IT!

T'S SEALED--RUTTED SHUT WITH THE WEIGHT OF ITS YEARS!

BUT TWILL PROVE NO OBSTACLE TO THE ENCHANTED HAMMER OF THOR!!
KRA-KOOM!

But even as the Thunder God did UNLEASH his mighty weapon, all around the musty chamber the dust-encrusted FIGURES that had stood mute and unmoving for untold centuries suddenly SHUDDERED...
...And AWOKE!


Silently did they shake off the veil of SLUMBER, and then did step from their shadowed NICHES, weapons at the ready, their grim purpose RENEWED.

Like monstrous SPECTERS did they move, DEATH held high in their hands, their booted feet barely WHISPERING against the cold stone flooring.
...But even a WHISPER proved too LOUD by far!
ZOUNDS!!

DEFEND THYSELF LOKI!!
WE ARE SORE BESET BY--
TITANS!!
FIRES OF VULCAN! THE LITTLE ONE DOTH MOVE LIKE THE VERY WIND!
I MUST HIE ME TO SAFETY SWIFTLY--
-- WHILST THE THUNDER GOD DOTH KEEP OUR MONSTROUS ADVERSARIES OCCUPIED!

FOR CENTURIES UNTOLD HAVE WE BEEN CHARGED TO PROTECT THAT WHICH LIES BEYOND THE DOOR THOU HAS SHATTERED LIKE. .
GREAT ZEUS!
THRANG!
LIKE I HAVE SHATTERED THY SLASHING BLADE, KNAVE?
TRULY THOU ART NO MATCH FOR...
AARRGGHH!!
BROK!
TRULY, THINE OVERCONFIDENCE SHALL BE THE DEA[illegible] OF THEE, LITTLE ONE!
JUST AS THOU SHALT SUFFER FOR THINE TITAN!
FOR, THOUGH LOKI BE NOT NEARLY THINE EQUAL IN PHYSICAL PROWESS..
SHAK!
--STILL DOTH THE GOD OF MISCHIEF POSSESS POWER ENOW TO CONQUER THEE!
MY THANKS BROTHER! THOU HAST PROVIDED ME RESPITE TO REGAIN MY SENSES!
THEN STRIKE, THUNDER GOD! IN THE NAME OF VICTORY-- STRIKE!!

BY ZEUS! THE LITTLE ONE'S HAMMER--!
THOK!
WHOK!
IT DOTH MOVE AS IF IT WERE ALIVE--!!
UUNNGGHH!!
AYE TITAN BUT BY FAR IT'S GREATEST ENCHANTMENT IS--
AARRGGHH!!
--IT MUST EVER RETURN TO ITS MASTER'S HAND!
THEN, WITH THY WEAPON IN HAND, SHALT THOU DIE, LITTLE ONE--
CROOM!
--THAT THOU MIGHTEST BE HASTENED ON THY JOURNEY TO THY FABLED VALHALLA!
THOU ART MORE POWERFUL THAN I HAD ALLOWED THEE CREDIT, TITANS--
--BUT STILL IS THE PRINCE OF ETERNAL ASGARD NO HELPLESS VICTIM TO BE EASILY SLAUGHTERED!

And thus, before the savage ONSLAUGHT of his many foes, did the Son of Odin hurtle back through the ancient PORTAL he had summarily SUNDERED mere moments before...
...Until, at last, he and his monstrous OPPONENTS did lay battered and sprawled...
...Before the great and glistening GEMSTONE that was at the very HEART of his noble QUEST.
Alive, before the legendary CRYSTAL OF BLOOD...
...And something MORE!
BY THE FLAMING BEARD OF ZEUS! IT CANNOT BE--!!
From time immemorial, these towering Titans had stood BEYOND this chamber defending the fabled BLOOD GEM, ever faithful to their given task, yet never once SUSPECTING
BY ODIN.

...Ehak they were but the blood crystal's FIRST line of defense!
Then from the Stygian depths of a dark and bubbling POOL there abruptly rose the enchanted gemstone's ULTIMATE GUARDIAN...
...and WOE be unto those who dared DISTURB its eternal REST!
BY THE BLOOD OF ARES! WHAT LIVING MADNESS DOTH DWELL HERE??
SWIFTLY, TITANS--MAKE THY WEAPONS READY...
...OR WE ARE LOST!!

But, alas, for all intents and purposes, the defiant Titans were ALREADY lost...
AAAIIEEEE
For at that instant, the serpentine guardian did STRIKE, its razor-toothed jaws SLAVERING in anticipation...

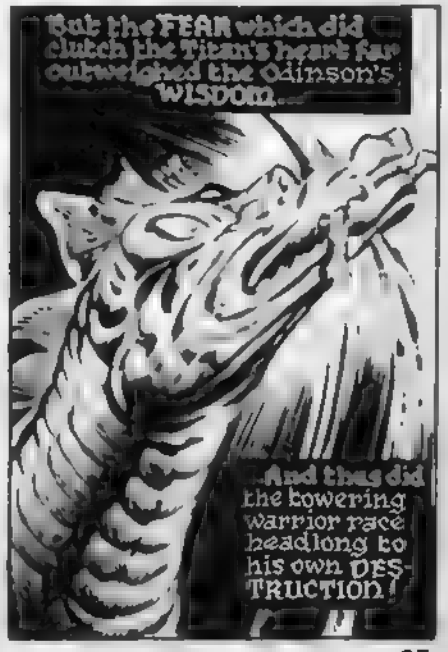
...And the still-dazed God of Thunder did WITNESS the savage slaughter in mute HORROR...

His heart HEAVY that such VALIANT foes should perish so IGNOBLY!
AAARRGH!

THOUGH THE TITANS THEMSELVES SOUGHT TO SLAY ME, STILL I CANNOT STAND IDLY BY AND SEE THEM DEVOURED BY ZOUNDS!
TITAN-- BEHIND THEE!!

IN THE NAME OF ZEUS-- NAY!
NAY!!

STAND THY GROUND, TITAN-- DEFEND THYSELF!!
TURN THY BACK TO THE DEMON-- AND IT SURELY SHALL SLAY THEE!

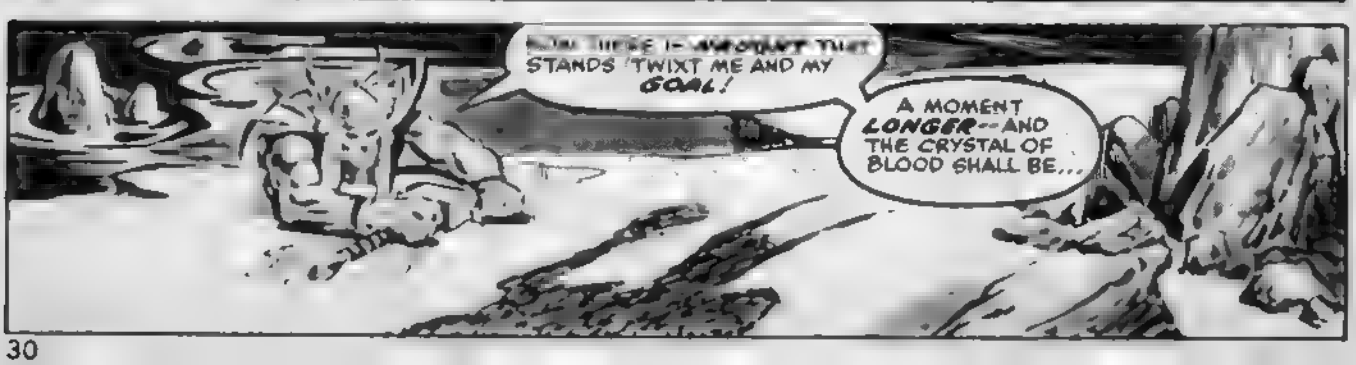

But the FEAR which did clutch the Titan's heart far outweighed the Odinson's WISDOM...
...And thus did the towering warrior race headlong to his own DESTRUCTION!

THE FINAL TITAN SLAIN, THE BEHEMOTH TURNS TOWARDS ME--
--BUT NOW IT DOTH CONFRONT A FOE OF EQUAL METTLE--
--A FOE WHO SHALL NOT FALTER, SHALL NOT FLEE!
NOW, DEMON-BEAST, DOST THOU FACE THE PRINCE OF ASGARD-- THE SON OF ODIN-- THE LIVING HEIR TO THE THRONE OF THE REALM ETERNAL!
NOW DOST THOU FACE THOR, BEHEMOTH-- GOD OF THUNDER--MASTER OF THE RAGING STORM, THE LIVING LIGHTNING--!
THOR, WHOSE ENCHANTED HAMMER DOTH POSSESS SHEER POWER ENOW TO DESTROY THEE WITHOUT MERCY!!
SO FALL THOU CRAVEN CREATURE-- FALL!!
BY THE BRISTLING BEARD OF ODIN-- THE BEHEMOTH DOTH YET STAND!!
'TIS AS IF MY MOST POTENT POWER-BURST WAS NO MORE TO IT THAN THE NOISESOME STING OF THE MOST INSIGNIFICANT INSECT!

BUT THE BATTLE BE NOT YET OVER, SERPENT-BEAST!
THY GAPING JAWS DOTH HOLD NO TERROR FOR A WARRIOR BORN!
THOU ART HELPLESS DEMON BEFORE THE STRENGTH OF THOR!
NOT SO LONG AS MINE ARMS DOTH POSSESS SHEER STRENGTH ENOW TO KEEP THY JAWS SPREAD WIDE!
BUT, VERILY, EVEN MY STRENGTH MAY NOT PROVE TO BE ENOUGH IN THE END!
THE BEHEMOTH DOTH NOT FALTER, DOTH NOT PAUSE IN ITS MERCILESS ATTACK!
IN TRUTH, IT MAY YET DEVOUR ME, UNLESS I TAKE THE INITIATIVE--
--AND STRIKE!!
BROK!
FALL, THOU LOATHESOME CREATURE! NAUGHT THAT LIVES CAN LONG STAND AGAINST THE ENCHANTED MALLET MJOLNIR!
FALL I SAY THEE! THOU ART MIGHTY INDEED-- BUT I AM MIGHTIER STILL!
FALL, BEHEMOTH! FALL! FALL!! FALL!!!

And yea, verily, did the monstrous serpent GUARDIAN at last SUCCUMB to the Thunder God's ONSLAUGHT...
...And it did HEAVE its final convulsive heave in somber SILENCE, as it had battled.
...No manner of SOUND escaping it great bloody lips, no sibilant HISS, no mournful SIGH...
Nay, not even its own remorseless DEATH-RATTLE!

AT LAST ..'TIS OVER.
THERE DOTH BE NO POWER THAT CAN E'ER AWAKEN YON BEHEMOTH FROM THIS FINAL SLEEP!


NOW THERE IS NAUGHT THAT STANDS 'TWIXT ME AND MY GOAL!
A MOMENT LONGER--AND THE CRYSTAL OF BLOOD SHALL BE...

MINE THUNDER GOD!
THE CRYSTAL OF BLOOD IS NOW MINE!!
THINE, LOKI? NAY, THE MYSTIC GEMSTONE SHALL NOW BELONG TO OUR MOST NOBLE FATHER!
BY HELA, THY NAIVETE DOTH ASTONISH ME!
FOR TIME BEYOND RECKONING HAVE I AWAITED THIS MOMENT, FOOL--WHEN I MIGHT POSSESS THE KEY TO MY ULTIMATE VICTORY!
AND NOW THAT IT BE MINE, NOTHING SHALL WREST IT FROM ME!!
I...I DO NOT UNDERSTAND! WHAT IS IT THOU DOST WANT, LOKI?
I'D HAVE THOUGHT THE ANSWER TO THAT QUITE OBVIOUS, DEAR BROTHER!
I WANT REVENGE!!
REVENGE FOR ALL THE INDIGNITIES I HAVE SUFFERED IN THY SHADOW!
WITH THE BLOOD CRYSTAL I CAN EASILY GAIN THAT REVENGE THOR--
"DOST THOU RECALL ODIN'S FAITHFUL MANSERVANT DRUVAK?"
DRUVAK, FETCH ME MY ROYAL SCEPTRE.
IMMEDIATELY OMNIPOTENT ONE.
I NEED ONLY CONCENTRATE FOR A MOMENT--
AND THOU SHALT RECALL HIM NO LONGER!"
I THANK THEE, MY GOOD AND FAITHFUL...
--BUT MAYHAP I SHOULD SHOW THEE NOW!
--PROJECT MINE ALL-CONSUMING HATRED FROM THIS CAVERN TO UNSUSPECTING ASGARD...
EHT

HOW ODD. FOR A MOMENT I THOUGHT THERE WAS SOMEONE ELSE IN..
BUT NAY, METHINKS 'TWAS MERELY THE MIND OF A MUCH-CONCERNED MONARCH WANDERING A BIT
ALREADY THE NON-EXISTENT DRUVAK IS FORGOTTEN..
..BY ALL SAVE ME!
JUST AS THOU SHALT BE FORGOTTEN, THUNDER GOD--WHEN NEXT MY BLOOD CRYSTAL DOTH STRIKE!
THEN SHALL LOKI BE ODIN'S FAVORITE SON--ODIN'S ONLY SON--AND NEXT IN LINE TO INHERIT THE GOLDEN THRONE!

SO THAT I MAY COME THAT MUCH CLOSER TO ATTAINING THE SOVEREIGNTY--
--'TIS TIME FOR THEE TO DIE!!

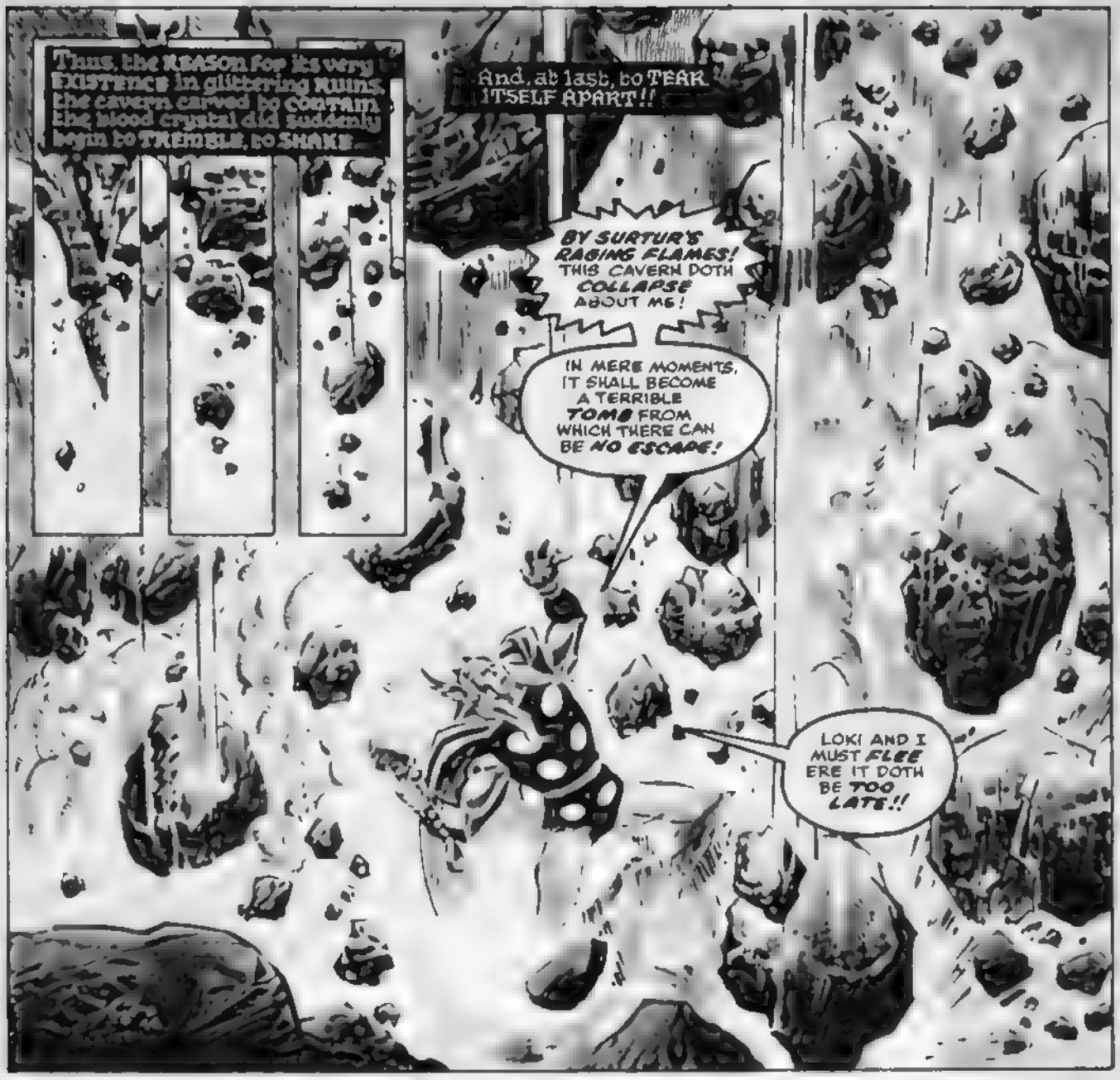
LOKI, THOU HAST TAKEN LEAVE OF THY SENSES!
OF WHAT ULTIMATE VALUE TO THEE WOULD BE A THRONE THOU WOULDST WIN THROUGH SUCH IGNOBLE TREACHERY?

FOOL WHAT MATTERS NOBILITY TO THE IMPATIENT GOD OF MISCHIEF?
TREACHERY IS MY BIRTHRIGHT--AS INCOMPARABLE STRENGTH IS THINE!

AYE, EVER HATH ODIN FAVORED THEE--MERELY BECAUSE THE ACCIDENT OF BIRTH DID MAKE THEE HIS NATURAL SON!
NEVER HATH ODIN NOTICED MINE ACCOMPLISHMENTS, MY MERITS--!

FOR FAR TOO LONG HATH ODIN BEEN BLINDED TO THE WORTHINESS OF LOKI BY THE CURSED GLOWING HALO THAT DOTH SEEM TO SURROUND THEE!
WELL, A MOMENT LONGER AND ALL THAT SHALL CHANGE! A MOMENT LONGER AND LOKI SHALL BE...

SLAIN, LITTLE ONE -- FOR THE GREATER GLORY OF ZEUS!!
KWHAM!
BY ODIN! ONE OF THE TITANS DOTH YET LIVE!!
BUT HOW?!?
UUNNHH!!
WHEN THE SERPENT-BEAST STRUCK, I WAS HURLED INTO THE WATER -- WHERE I DID FLOAT IN A DAZE...
.. UNTIL NOW!!
THE CRYSTAL OF BLOOD IS ONCE MORE MINE TO PROTECT!
BUT FIRST I SHALL USE ITS AWESOME POWER TO DESTROY THEE BOTH LIKE...
ENOUGH OF THIS UNHOLY MADNESS, TITAN!
LET THERE BE AN END TO IT-- NOW!!
THRAK!
SPRAK!
Hurled without mercy, the mighty weapon called MJOLNIR, THE DESTROYER, struck savagely, SHATTERING the arcane blood crystal and laying the Titan low...


Thus, the REASON for its very EXISTENCE in glittering ruins, the cavern carved to CONTAIN the wood crystal did suddenly begin to TREMBLE, to SHAKE...
And, at last, to TEAR ITSELF APART!!
BY SURTUR'S RAGING FLAMES! THIS CAVERN DOTH COLLAPSE ABOUT ME!
IN MERE MOMENTS, IT SHALL BECOME A TERRIBLE TOMB FROM WHICH THERE CAN BE NO ESCAPE!
LOKI AND I MUST FLEE ERE IT DOTH BE TOO LATE!!

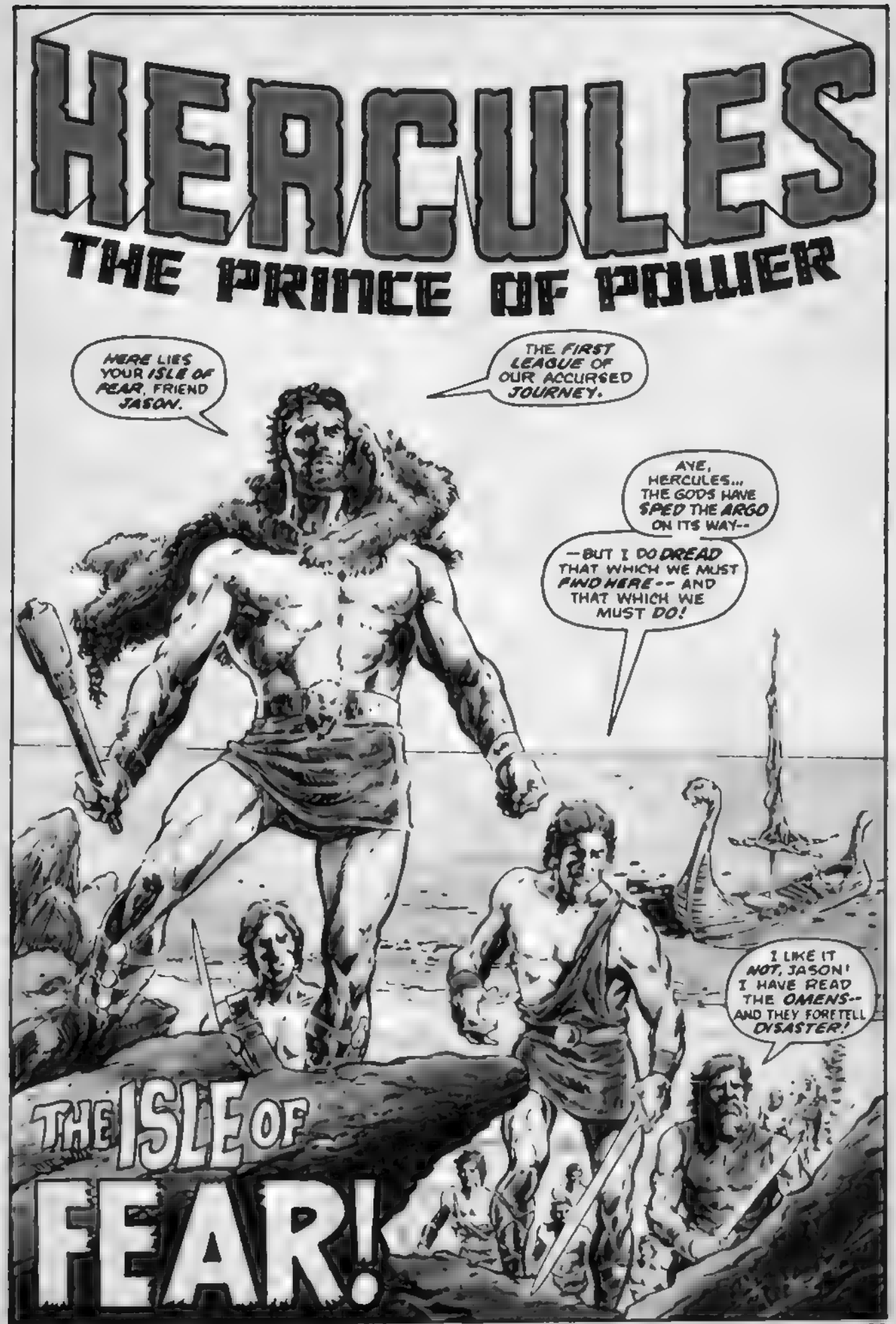
And, heedless of his own SAFETY, the noble God of THUNDER did PULL his battered brother from beneath the falling RUBBLE...

To SALVATION!
I SEEK TO DESTROY THEE, AND YET THOU DOST SAVE MY LIFE?
TRULY THOU ART A FAR GREATER FOOL THAN I HAD IMAGINED!
NAY LOKI, THOUGH I MAY CURSE THE FATES THAT MADE IT SO..
...I AM THY BROTHER.

AND WE ARE BOTH OF US OMN POTENT ODIN'S SONS!

The journey BACK to immortal Asgard is passed with a solemn SILENCE which speaks far MORE than mere WORDS ever could--
--And when, at last the sons of Odin did stand before their fabled FATHER once more--
...AND THAT IS ALL THERE IS LEFT TO SAY, MOST HIGH.
THE BLOOD CRYSTAL WAS DESTROYED IN OUR BATTLE WITH THE TITANS, AND THE CAVERN THAT HAD HELD IT SEALED FOREVER!
FORGIVE US OMNIPOTENT ONE. FOR WE HAVE FAILED THEE.
NAY THOR--THOU DIDST NOT FAIL ME.
BUT WE RETURNED WITHOUT THE BLOOD CRYSTAL, SIRE
THAT ENCHANTED GEMSTONE WAS FAR TOO POWERFUL TO REMAIN IN EXISTENCE, THUNDER GOD.
I WOULD HAVE DESTROYED IT MYSELF HADST THOU BROUGHT IT TO ME!
AYE THOU DIDST WELL.. MY GOOD AND FAITHFUL SONS
THOU ART FREE TO DEPART THE PRESENCE
NAY THOR--NOT THEE I BID THEE REMAIN.
I WOULD HAVE A WORD WITH THEE, THUNDER GOD
I AM EVER AT THY SERVICE MILORD.
THEN TELL ME, MY SON... HOW DIDST THY BROTHER LOKI FARE ON THY PERILOUS QUEST?
HE. HE WAS..HE WAS EVERY INCH AN ASGARDIAN, FATHER, TRUE TO HIS NOBLE HERITAGE.

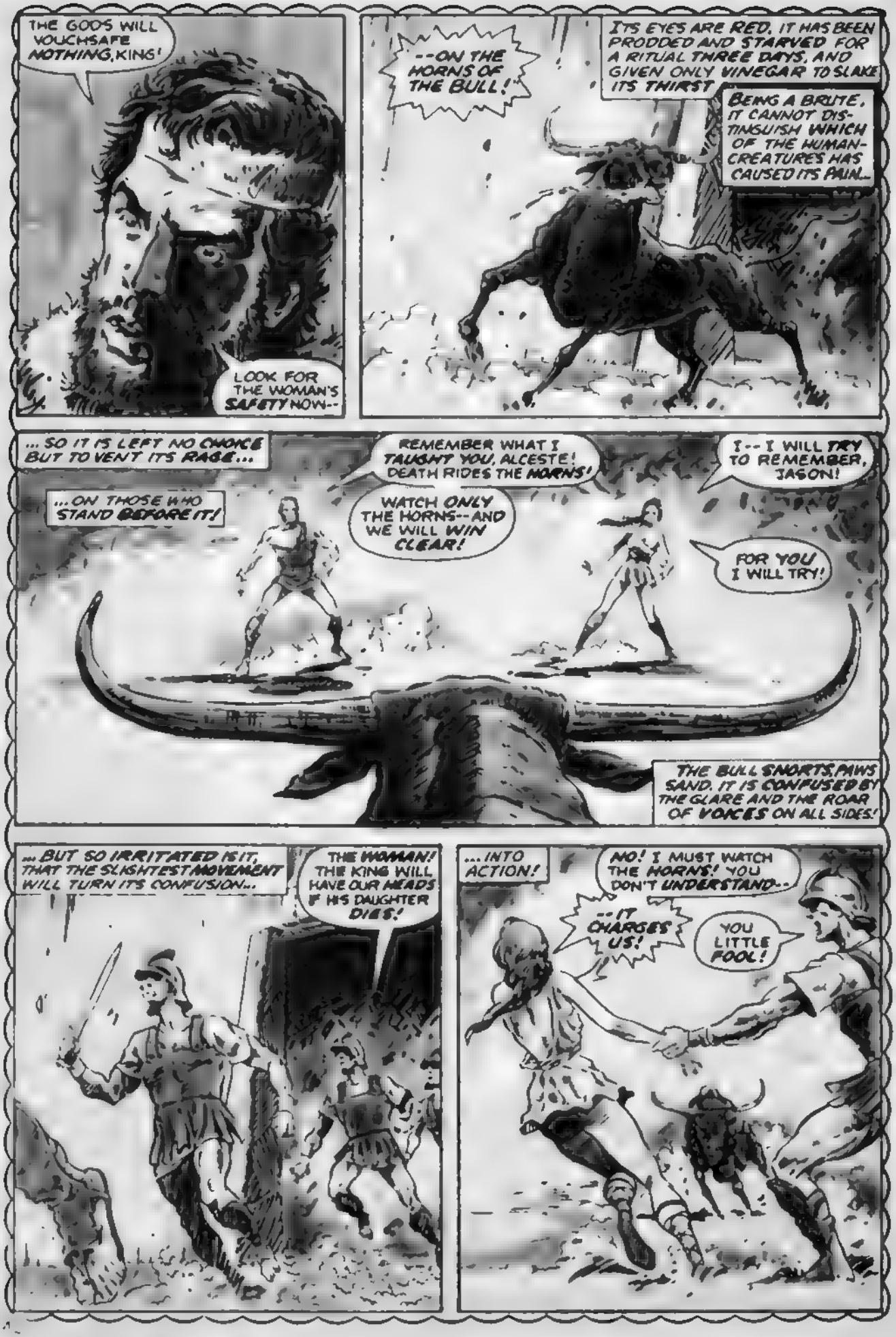
THOU WOULDST HAVE BEEN PROUD OF HIM.
THAT IS THY FINAL WORD ON THE MATTER, MY SON?
AYE... MY FATHER.
THEN THOU HAST FILLED MINE HEART TO OVERFLOWING, THUNDER GOD--
--FOR THOU HAST SPOKEN AS EVER I KNEW THOU WOULDST SPEAK!
EVEN AS I KNOW THY WORDS TOUCH ONLY THY LIPS AND NOT THY HEART.
WHAT! BUT, SIRE, I...
SILENCE, THOR! 'TIS MY TURN TO SPEAK!
THOUGH ODIN IS SUPREME AMONG ALL THE GODS, TRULY HAVE THERE BEEN OTHER GODS SUPREME BEFORE ME--
--AS THERE SHALL BE THOSE SUPREME WHO DOTH FOLLOW ME!
SOMEDAY MY SON, WHEN VALHALLA HATH AT LAST CLAIMED ME EITHER THEE OR THY BROTHER SHALL SIT THE GOLDEN THRONE IN MY STEAD!
THAT IS WHY I SENT THEE BOTH IN QUEST OF THE BLOOD CRYSTAL!
SO THAT I MIGHT BEST DETERMINE WHICH OF THEE BE MOST WORTHY TO RULE O'ER THE REALM ETERNAL!
AND NOW, AT LAST, MOST NOBLE THUNDER GOD...
...I KNOW THE FATEFUL ANSWER!
FIN


HERCULES
THE PRINCE OF POWER
HERE LIES YOUR ISLE OF FEAR, FRIEND JASON.
THE FIRST LEAGUE OF OUR ACCURSED JOURNEY.
AYE, HERCULES... THE GODS HAVE SPED THE ARGO ON ITS WAY--
--BUT I DO DREAD THAT WHICH WE MUST FIND HERE-- AND THAT WHICH WE MUST DO!
I LIKE IT NOT, JASON! I HAVE READ THE OMENS-- AND THEY FORETELL DISASTER!
THE ISLE OF FEAR!

Story: BILL MANTLO / Art: VAL MAYERIK

I, TOO, HAVE READ THE OMENS, AEGISTHUS--
--AND TO ME THEY SPOKE ONLY OF A FOWL WHO REGRETTED HAVING HER GUTS SPILLED ALL OVER A COLD DECK!
MOCK NOT THE MEN, HERCULES!
IF THEY SPEAK OF THEIR FEAR--
--IT WILL NOT OVERRULE THEIR REASON WHEN COMES THE TIME TO FIGHT!
PERHAPS, LAD-- BUT 'TWILL NOT BE REASON WE'LL NEED THEN--
--BUT GOOD MEN-- WITH SWORD AND SPEAR AT THE READY!
"OR HAVE YOU SO SOON FORGOTTEN PYLOS, LAD, THE STINK OF BLOOD ON THE HOT SAND OF THE ARENA--
--THE BREATH FAIRLY REELING YOU BACK AS THE THRICE ACCURSED CROWD BELLOWED FOR MORE--
"--AND THAT MISBEGOTTEN FLEA BAG OF A DESPOT KING--"
KREON!
I GROW WEARY OF THE WAITING! WHERE IS THIS SPORT YOU PROMISED, O KING?
IT WILL COME, HERCULES --SOON!
I HAVE BUT TO SIGNAL MY MASTER OF THE GAMES!
THEN SIGNAL AND BE DONE!
HAVE A CARE, OLYMPIAN! YOU SPEAK TO THE KING OF PYLOS!

EH, CAPTAIN! IT WOULD PLEASE US GREATLY IF YOU WOULD CHECK ON THE-- EH-- PROGRESS OF THE PREPARATIONS!
AND SEE TO IT THAT THE GUARD WHO DARED INSULT OUR GUEST IS DRAWN AND QUARTERED!
WE CANNOT AFFORD TO HAVE THE SON OF ZEUS ANGERED AT US!
IT SHALL BE AS YOU SAY, SIRE!
GODS, BUT I DO GROW BLISTERS, KREON!
BUT, WAIT THE FAR-GATE DOTH OPEN!
THE TRUMPETS SOUND--
--THE GAMES DO BEGIN!!
THERE IS A ROAR FROM THE WINE-SOAKED CROWD. IN THE GATE-WAY STANDS JASON --THE CAPTAIN OF ARGO.
... BUT THEN A HUSH SWALLOWS THE ANTICIPATION OF THE GAMES TO COME...
..AND THE PEOPLE OF THE PORT-CITY OF PYLOS STARE.
FOR, BESIDE JASON STANDS A LITHE AND YOUTHFUL FORM, HER GOLDEN HAIR LIFTING SLIGHTLY IN THE BREEZE.
ALCESTE, THE DAUGHTER OF THE KING OF PYLOS.
NO! BY ALL THE GODS THERE BE --
--NO!!


THE GODS WILL VOUCHSAFE NOTHING, KING!
LOOK FOR THE WOMAN'S SAFETY NOW--
--ON THE HORNS OF THE BULL!
ITS EYES ARE RED. IT HAS BEEN PRODDED AND STARVED FOR A RITUAL THREE DAYS, AND GIVEN ONLY VINEGAR TO SLAKE ITS THIRST
BEING A BRUTE, IT CANNOT DISTINGUISH WHICH OF THE HUMAN-CREATURES HAS CAUSED ITS PAIN..
... SO IT IS LEFT NO CHOICE BUT TO VENT ITS RAGE...
...ON THOSE WHO STAND BEFORE IT!
REMEMBER WHAT I TAUGHT YOU, ALCESTE! DEATH RIDES THE HORNS!
WATCH ONLY THE HORNS--AND WE WILL WIN CLEAR!
I-- I WILL TRY TO REMEMBER, JASON!
FOR YOU I WILL TRY!
THE BULL SNORTS, PAWS SAND. IT IS CONFUSED BY THE GLARE AND THE ROAR OF VOICES ON ALL SIDES!
...BUT SO IRRITATED IS IT, THAT THE SLIGHTEST MOVEMENT WILL TURN ITS CONFUSION...
THE WOMAN! THE KING WILL HAVE OUR HEADS IF HIS DAUGHTER DIES!
...INTO ACTION!
NO! I MUST WATCH THE HORNS! YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND--
--IT CHARGES US!
YOU LITTLE FOOL!

ALCESTE!
THE HORNS!!
PERHAPS THE GUARD THINKS HIMSELF ATTACKED BY JASON'S CRY. PERHAPS HE, TOO, IS CONFUSED BY THE VOICES.
WHATEVER, HE RELEASES THE KING'S DAUGHTER IN ORDER TO DRAW HIS SWORD.
HE REALIZES HIS ERROR TOO LATE!
YEEAGGHH!
J-JASON...?
DOWN WOMAN--
DOWN!!
ARE YOU ALRIGHT?
MY ANKLE JASON!
IT'S TWISTED! I CANNOT RUN!
BUT... YOU MUST! BY ALL THE GODS--
--YOU MUST!
AND BLOOD, THE BRUTE HAS DECIDED-- IS BETTER THAN VINEGAR.

WATCH THE HORNS JASON HAD SAID.
THEY HAVE NO CHOICE...
...FOR THERE'S NOTHING BUT SAND BETWEEN.
ALCESTE, I--
YOU WOULD DO WELL TO LEARN NOT TO INDULGE THE DAUGHTERS OF KINGS, LAD!
YOU'VE PLACED US ALL ON THE HORNS!
HERCULES!
AYE, JASON--
--HERCULES! SON OF ZEUS ALMIGHTY!
BORN OF HIS LOVE FOR MY MORTAL MOTHER --ALCMENA!
I WHO WAS RAISED AMONG LIONS--HIDDEN FROM HERAS RAGE!
I WHOSE LABOUR'S CAUSED A WORLD TO STAND IN WONDER-MENT--
--WHOSE STRENGTH CAUSED FEAR EVEN AMONGST THE GODS!
AYE, LAD! HERCULES!!
KRRAA!!

THE PRINCE OF POWER!!
AACK!
AND ALL IN THE NAME OF GLORY, LAD!
ALL FOR GLORY!!
BUT THERE ARE SOME WHO DON'T SEE IT QUITE THAT WAY.
DEATH!
BRING ME JASON'S SKIN --OR BY THE GODS, I'LL FLAY YOU ALL!
YOU ENDANGER THE KING'S DAUGHTER --AND YET YOU ASK?
YOU ARE A FOOL, JASON!
HE IS A DEAD FOOL, CAPTAIN!
FATHER, NO!
WHAT HAVE I DONE?

SILENCE, DAUGHTER! IS IT NOT ENOUGH THAT I HAVE BEEN SHAMED BEFORE MY PEOPLE!
BLAME NOT ALCESTE SIRE. I--
HOLD YOUR TONGUE, DOOMED ONE!
BUT, FATHER-- I ASKED JASON TO TEACH ME THE ART OF THE BULL-LEAPERS!
THEN IT IS YOU WHO HAVE DOOMED HIM, MY DAUGHTER!
BUT--BUT DOESN'T IT MATTER--
--THAT I LOVE HIM!
FORTUNATELY, NO! IT IS I WHO WILL DECIDE WHOM YOU MAY OR MAY NOT LOVE! I--
PEACE, KING OF PYLOS! I CRAVE A BOON--
--AS IS MY RIGHT FOR SLAYING THE CEREMONIAL BULL!
YES, THAT IS SO!
THEN LET IT BE THIS BOY'S LIFE! TAKING IT WILL GAIN YOU NOTHING--
--AND I WILL SEE TO IT THAT HE LEAVES PYLOS, NOT TO RETURN UNTIL HE HAS DONE PROPER PENANCE FOR AFFRONTING YOU.
BETTER YET, HERCULES --NEVER TO RETURN UNLESS HE CAN BRING ME THE GOLD OF THE GORGON--
--FROM THE SHORES OF THE ISLE OF FEAR!
OH, JASON...
WELL, LAD? DOES NOT THAT SAND GRATE ON YOUR KNEES!
WE HAVE A TASK TO TEND TO!

BUT THE ISLE OF FEAR, HERCULES--
IS AN ISLAND LIKE ANY OTHER, LAD--
--AND ONCE WE'VE A SHIP AND CREW--
"--THE GORGON'S GOLD WILL BE OURS FOR THE TAKING!!"
GODS, BUT I'D SWEAR A WIND HAS WHIPPED UP JUST TO [illegible] US!
OMENS, HERCULES! I THOUGHT BETTER OF YOU!
SO! EVEN A GODLING CAN FEAR AN EVIL WIND--
--AND WISH HE STOOD A QUIETER BERTH BACK ON THE STREETS OF PYLOS!
HAVE A CARE, AEGISTHUS! BECAUSE I LIKE NOT THE CHILL IN THE AIR--
--IS NO CAUSE TO CAST CLAIMS OF WITCHERY AGAINST ME!
HERCULES? IN ALL GAIA OR OLYMPUS--
--IS THERE ANY TALE TOLD OF LIONS THAT FLY?
ONLY WHEN HEPHAESTUS HAS TAKEN TOO MUCH NECTAR, LAD! WHY?
I JUST WISHED TO KNOW BEFORE I ABANDONED REASON, AND CRIED--

"GRIFFIN!"
RRRRR...
...ROWRRRR!
BY THE SILVER BOW OF APOLLO--
--YOU HAVE SPEARS DON'T YOU?
CAST THEM!!
THEY OBEY, THESE MEN OF THE ARGO...
...BUT OF WHAT USE ARE SPEARS...
TCHAK
SKRAK
...AGAINST A HIDE AS STRONG AS STEEL?
IT FALLS UPON THE MEN!
DEVOURS THEM!!
FOR A MOMENT, THE PRINCE OF POWER IS TOO STUNNED TO REACT...
...BUT THEN THE SCREAMS OF THE VICTIMS REACH HIS EARS

HERE, AEGISTHUS!
BY MY FATHER'S BEARD-- HERCULES IS HERE!!
BUT EVEN THE INTERVENTION OF A DEMI-GOD SEEMS NOT ENOUGH TO STOP THE SLAVERING RAMPAGE OF THE MYSTIC BEAST.
RRROW-RR
HERCULES! THE BEAST TAKES FLIGHT.
LEAP CLEAR, LAD! LEAP CLEAR!
I--I CANNOT! IT RISES TOO HIGH!
THEN SECURE YOUR HOLD, LAD! GRIP TIGHT THE MAD BEAST'S MANE!
FOR IF YOU ARE UNABLE TO COME TO THE PRINCE OF POWER--

THEN 'TIS HERCULES WHO MUST COME TO YOU!
UNABLE TO CLIMB UP HIGHER ON THE CREATURE FOR FEAR OF BEING DROPPED, HERCULES' MIND DRIFTS BACK DAYS EARLIER...
SO, LAD, D'YE THINK THE GOLDEN-HAIRED WENCH WAS WORTH THE TROUBLE WE'VE BEEN PUT TO?
IT WASN'T HER HAIR THAT INTERESTED ME, HERCULES! SHE HAD OTHER--
--MORE ENDEARING QUALITIES!
QUALITIES SHE SHARES WITH THE REST OF HER SEX, JASON!
BY THE GODS! THE WOMAN MUST LOVE ME!
OH, SHE GAVE ME THIS RING TO GIVE YOU ERE WE DEPARTED!
THAT STONE IS WORTH AT LEAST A SHIP AND CREW!
WHICH IS WHAT IT WILL BUY, CAPTAIN! THE ARGO HAS BEEN ROTTING ON THE DOCKS SINCE OUR LAST VOYAGE--
--AND HER CREW HAS GROWN SO USED TO LANDED WAYS-
--THAT WE SHALL HAVE TO PUMP THE SALT BACK INTO THEM!
SPEAK I NOT THE TRUTH OLD ONE?
IS IT TRULY THOU, MILORD?
DO WE SAIL AGAIN?

AYE, OLD ONE! WE SAIL!
WHERE HAVE THE DOCK-BILGE OF PYLOS ALLOWED THE ARGO TO ANCHOR?
THERE, MY PRINCE! AMIDST THE GARBAGE OF THE MERCHANT SCOWS!
THEN WE MUST CLEAN THE CABBAGE STINK FROM OUT HER SAILS, OLD MAN--
--BY UNFURLING THEM AND TURNING THEM INTO THE WIND!
TIMON! ORESTUS!
AYE, MY PRINCE?
WE SAIL, ORESTUS-- WITH THE FIRST TIDE! YOUR CAPTAIN HAS MADE HIMSELF... UNWELCOME AMONGST THE GENTRY OF PYLOS, AND--
JASON? UNWELCOME? THERE WAS A WENCH, NO DOUBT!
TELL US, HERCULES! DID SHE HAVE HAIR THE COLOR OF THAT FLEECE HE HAD US WIN FOR HIM?
THAT SHE DID, CRATES! THOUGH METHINKS I DID DETECT TRACES OF DYE AMONGST THE GOLD!
HE LIES, SAILORS -- BUT NO MATTER! HER JEWELRY IS MORE THAN ADEQUATE TO MAKE UP FOR ANY VANITY SHE MAY AFFECT--
--AND IT HAS BROUGHT OUR RELEASE FROM THESE WRETCHED DOCKS!
WHITHER ARE WE BOUND, CAPTAIN?
FOR TREASURE, LADS -- ENOUGH TO SOFTEN A HARD KING'S HEART!
AND ENOUGH TO WIN A PRINCESS-- DYED OR PURE!
WE'RE BOUND FOR GLORY, MY LADS--
--FOR THE ISLE OF FEAR!!
MAY ZEUS PRESERVE US!

MAY ZEUS INDEED... FOR THESE STOUT MEN HAVE GREAT NEED OF SUCH DIVINE PRESERVATION NOW.
SAILORS! WHY RETURN YOU IN SUCH HASTE?
AND WHERE ARE OUR CAPTAINS--HERCULES AND JASON?
GONE TO HADES ON THE BACK OF A WINGED DEMON OLD MAN!
LOOSE THE SAILS --OR WE MAY YET BE NEXT WHEN THE GRIFFIN HUNTS!
GRIFFIN? ARE YE MAD, WARRIOR?
YE HAVE DESERTED THY CAPTAIN AND THY PRINCE--AND YE SPEAK TO ME OF FABLES AND MONSTERS? WARRIOR, I NAME YE LIAR!
DO YOU, OLD MAN? CANST THOU LOOK AT THAT WHICH ARISES FROM THE WAVES--
--AND STILL DOUBT THE WORDS OF THEY WHO HAVE SEEN!!
BY THE TRIDENT OF POSEIDON!
THE BEHEMOTH RISES, BRINGING WITH IT THE STENCH OF UNTOLD DEPTHS OF THE SEA.

ARE YE MEN, ARGONAUTS--
MUST AN OLD MAN NOTCH ARROW TO BOW AND TEACH YE THE WAY OF WARRIORS?!
TWANG
--OR BOYS THAT YE WOULD RUN FROM A CREATURE OF SALT AND SLIME?
YEEAHH
SKRAAAAAAAA
BY HERA! MY SHAFT HAS ONLY MADDENED THE BEAST!
THE SHIP! IT RAMS THE SHIP!!
AND NOW WE MUST FIGHT --LIKE MINNOWS TRYING TO BRING DOWN A SHARK!
MAY APHRODITE WATCH OVER US--
--FOR THIS DAY WE--

--DIE BEAST!
WHY DON'T YOU DIE!?
IT WILL, LAD! YOUR SWORD HAS FOUND ITS HEART!
THE GRIFFIN FALLS!
AYE, SON OF ZEUS--
--BUT SO DO WE!!
TRUE ENOUGH LAD--BUT WITH THAT MOUNTAIN OF FLESH TO CUSHION YOU--
--I SHOULD WORRY LESS ABOUT THE FALL THEN WHERE THE BEAST HAS BROUGHT US!
WHRUMP!
'TIS PLAIN THE GRIFFIN WAS A CREATION OF THE GORGON, HERCULES!
GODS, WHAT MADNESS! I DO BEGIN TO WONDER IF ALCESTE IS TRULY WORTH IT!
OF COURSE SHE ISN'T, LAD! WHAT WOMAN IS? BUT COME--
--THE QUEST AWAITS US STILL, AND IN THE FULFILLMENT OF IT WILL WE FIND THAT WHICH IS PRECIOUS ABOVE ALL ELSE!
GLORY!!
A PATH, HERCULES! CUT FROM LIVING STONE--LEADING UPWARDS TO A TEMPLE--
--AND FLANKED BY THE STATUES OF GREEK WARRIORS! SCULPTED AS IF AT ANY MOMENT THEY WOULD LEAP FORTH AND FIGHT AGAIN!
NOT SCULPTED, FRIEND JASON! TRANSFORMED!
HAVE YOU SO SOON FORGOTTEN THE TALES OF THE GORGON MEDUSA? HOW HER GAZE--

--MAY TURN MEN TO STONE, HERCULES?
DO MEN STILL TELL THE OLD TALES? I HAD THOUGHT THEY WOULD HAVE GONE ON TO NEWER THINGS!
MEDUSA!!
IS IT SHE, HERCULES?
IS IT REALLY SHE?
DOES THE BOY DOUBT ME, OLYMPIAN? LET HIM COME FORTH AND SEE FOR HIMSELF!
STAND THY GROUND, LAD! HEED HER NOT!
YOU ARE SELFISH, HERCULES! THE BOY SENSES LIFE WITHIN ME! LIFE ETERNAL!
YOU ALREADY POSSESS IMMORTALITY, MAN-GOD--
--LET HIM NOW HAVE HIS CHANCE!
HER VOICE ... SO BEAUTIFUL.
JASON!!
HUSH, MAN-GOD! THE BOY HAS BUT TO TASTE OF THE GOLDEN APPLES--
--AND HE WILL BE AS AGELESS AS ARE WE!
SEE HOW HUNGRILY HE REACHES OUT FOR IT?

WITCH!
IT IS NOT LIFE HE REACHES OUT FOR--
--BUT DEATH EVER-LASTING!
MY COWL--!!
YOU ARE RIGHT, OLYMPI
IT WAS DEA
HE SOUGH
AFTER
--AND IT IS DEATH HE HAS FOUND!
AND YOU ARE NEXT, MAN-GOD--!
YET MEDUSA DID NOT LIE! HE WILL LIVE FOREVER!
--IMMORTALIZED IN STONE!
NO WITCH--
--FOR I HAVE KEPT MY EYES TIGHT SHUT SINCE MY MACE THREW BACK THY COWL!
SPLOOSH!
AND AS LONG AS MY EYES DO NOT MEET YOURS-- HERCULES WILL ESCAPE THE FATE THOU HAST WROUGHT ON OTHERS!

GOOD, MAN-GOD! KEEP SHUT YOUR EYES--
--AND MEDUSA WILL SEEK OUT YOUR THROAT AND OFFER YOU AS SACRIFICE TO YOUR THRICE-ACCURSED FATHER!
BLEAT, HERCULES! BLEAT LIKE THE SHEEP YOU ARE!
BY THE GODS, DEMON! YOU'LL NOT HAVE HERCULES!
THERE YOU ARE WRONG, MAN-GOD!
UUUUKK...
THUK!
WHO--??
OLD ONE!!
THE SHIP IS SAVED, CAPTAIN --THOUGH THE CREW IS LOST!
I THANK THEE FOR LETTING ME DIE...
...AS A WARRIOR!
THE PRINCE OF POWER LAYS THE OLD WARRIOR'S HEAD TO THE GROUND, AND THE CRIES OF LIFE WELL UP AROUND THEM.
WITH THE GORGON'S DEATH, THOSE TRANSFORMED BY HER GAZE RETURN AT LAST FROM THEIR DREAM OF STONE!
AND AFTER THE OLD MAN HAS BEEN ENTOMBED WITH FULL HONORS...
THE GORGON IS DEAD! THE GOLDEN APPLES OURS!
THE ARGO SURVIVES TO CARRY YOU--HER NEW CREW--BACK TO PYLOS--
--WHILE HERCULES AND I GO ON AHEAD MOUNTED ON THE MEDUSA'S WINGED STEED!
JOIN US IN PYLOS ARGONAUTS--FOR IN THAT CITY WILL WE FIND GLORY!

AND IN PYLOS...
AGAIN I BESEECH THEE FOR THY DAUGHTER'S HAND, LORD KREON!
SURELY THE BRIDE-PRICE I OFFER IS SUFFICIENT!
MORE THAN SUFFICIENT, IONUS! MUCH MORE--
--AND ENOUGH! YOU SHALL HAVE MY DAUGHTER, BY MY COMMAND.
AND THE WEDDING WILL TAKE PLACE--
IN HADES, LIAR KING!
JASON!!
AYE, KREON! THE QUEST IS DONE!
IMPOSS--NO ONE HAS EVER RETURNED FROM THE ISLE OF FEAR!!
THIS IS SOME TRICK OF YOU AND THE OLYMPIAN!
COUNT THE GOLD, THEN, KING--
--SEE THAT IT IS THE GORGONS AND THEN I'LL CLAIM YOUR DAUGHTER AS MY BRIDE!
GOLD? BUT MEDUSA HAD NO GOLD! ONLY--
--GODS! THE BAG MOVES! SOMETHING STRIKES AT MY HAND!
BY PLUTO! A VIPER!!
IS HE DEAD, JASON?
AS DEAD AS COULD BE WISHED, ALCESTE!
DO YOU HEAR, PEOPLE OF PYLOS? THE KING IS DEAD!!
THE ARGONAUTS HAVE SEEN TO THE GUARDS, JASON! METHINKS THERE IS NOTHING TO FEAR FROM KREON'S LACKEY'S!
THOU SPEAKEST TRUTH, HERCULES!

THEN LET IT BE KNOWN THAT I, JASON, CAPTAIN OF THE AGRO--
--DO CLAIM THE THRONE OF PYLOS AND THE PAST-KING'S DAUGHTER FOR MY OWN!
TYRANNY IS DEAD, CITIZENS!
LONG LIVE JASON! LONG LIVE THE KING!!
AND LONG LIVE GLORY LAD! FORGET NOT THAT!
HERCULES! WHERE ARE YOU GOING?
AWAY, LAD! I'VE NO PATIENCE WITH KINGS OR THRONES--
--AND I GIVE YOU A WEEK BEFORE THE WENCH THROWS YOU OVER FOR ANOTHER!
'TIS NOT MY WAY, LAD! I PREFER A GOOD BATTLE-- MACE IN HAND--
--OR A WOMAN WHO HAS PROPER RESPECT FOR THE FACT THAT I BE THE SON OF ZEUS!
FARE THEE WELL, JASON! MAYBE OUR PATHS SHALL MEET AGAIN--
-- WHEN YOU'VE GIVEN UP HARD THRONES FOR THE FEEL OF A DECK ONCE MORE BENEATH YOUR FEET!

RUDY D. NEBRES